

THE POSITION
OF
WOMAN
IN
ISLAM

A Comparative Study

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and

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In the name of Allah, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful

Woman in Islam .

by

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The Tragedy of Woman in the West

by

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WOMAN IN ISLAM

By Nazhat Afza

For centuries Islam has been a victim of deliberate distortion in the eyes of the Western world. The challenge presented by the Crescent to the Cross prompted various misrepresentations which a Muslim encounters in Europe. The saddest thing about the issue is that it is not only the West that harbours gross misconceptions regarding Islam but a great number of the followers of Islam themselves, ever since they came under the impact of Western civilisation. They are also unable to comprehend the essence of this exquisite, all-embracing code of life.

As regards the various misinterpretations of Islam in the Western society where the predilection towards atheism and agnosticism has become conspicuous, it is not surprising that most people should condemn our great religion without even knowing its rudimentary principles. However, one is not startled a little when one hears a highly educated, supposedly enlightened Westerner put forward this blatant untruth with perfect ease, feeling no qualm of conscience, that "in Islam, a woman has no soul."

Woman and the Christian World

If it were a question of the pot calling the kettle black, nobody could object : a black kettle could not be any less black if the pot did not call it so. But here seems to be a case of the black kettle calling the white china-pot black, because it is white! Who can deny the incredible atrocities inflicted upon women in the name of Christ ? Who can deny the

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untold misery and awful plight of women in the Roman Empire when hot oil was poured on their bodies ; when they were dragged tied with the tails of fast-running horses ; when they were tied with pillars while fire was made to approach them from the pedestals ? But this era of cruelty and oppression did not end there ; even late in the seventeenth century, the Council of the wise men which met at Rome unanimously gave the most inhuman verdict that "woman has no soul."

Dr. Aspring in his book exposes the heinous crimes committed against women in the Middle Ages. He says that in England alone in the year 1500 A.D., a special council was set up for persecuting women. It devised new means for perpetrating cruelty and oppression on women with the result that Christians burnt nine million women alive! It was a sombre indictment of man's injustice to woman before which the calamities of history fell into insignificance. The irreparable injury which was inflicted upon women in Christendom defies description.

The condition of women before Islam was miserable throughout the world. No religion allowed them equality. No religion gave them a share in the property of their parents or husbands. Women were looked upon as evil and an unwanted burden, a source of disgrace and humiliation to the family. Women were universally treated as chattels. Their own consent in anything was considered immaterial. In fact, they were never viewed as a party to the marriage. They could be had at pleasure and discarded most capriciously ; only the heart and purse could lay limitations. They had no independent status, could own no property, were given no rights of inheritance. In Arabia particularly, immediately before Islam, their plight was simply miserable. They were not regarded as human beings ; women stood somewhere between the animal world and man. But the Teacher, who in an age when no country, no system, no

community gave any right to woman, maiden or married, mother or wife—who, in a country where the birth of a daughter was considered a calamity, made secure for the fair sex rights which are only unwillingly, and under pressure, being conceded to European women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the civilised nations, deserves the gratitude of humanity. If Muhammad s.a.w. had done nothing more, his claim to be the greatest benefactor of mankind would have been indisputable. Is it not then diabolical malice on the part of certain Western critics to point to the saviour of womankind (who restored to them their rightful position in human society) as their enemy?

Woman : Before and After Islam

In the religions of the world Islam is the only exception which gave the attribute “better half” to woman and established her separate identity, thus giving her an independent and honourable status. Islam not only dignified the status of man but also raised the status of woman to a footing of near equality with man. Before the advent of Islam women had no position in society. They were at the mercy and caprice of their menfolk and were treated as goods and chattels. Unrestricted polygamy was the order of the day and women could be divorced at the whim and pleasure of their husbands. Concubinage and slavery were the recognised social institutions. It was Islam that, for the first time, vindicated the rights of women and gave them a status unknown, unthought of even to this day. They are granted all the fundamental rights. They are given the right of inheritance of the property of their father, mother, husband and brothers. As regards marriage and divorce, they have got fair liberty. Islam has removed various domestic and conjugal hardships of the women by prohibiting the unlimited polygamy prevalent in those days and prevailing nowadays in the Western society, of course in an

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unacknowledged and unlegalised form. Women are encouraged to study and acquire learning. All women and men are alike. Both should acquire education "from the cradle to the grave." In short, Islam has made adequate provisions for preparing the women as equal partners of men. There is no other religion in the world that favours women so much as Islam. It raised her from the lowest status to equality with men when the Holy Qur'an brought the following Gospel : "O people! be careful of (your duty to) your Lord, Who created its mate of the same (kind)."¹

The Holy Prophet's words explain the verse very eloquently when he says : "Women are the twin halves of men." Could there be any justification, in view of the above quotations, of the gross misstatements of some Western scholars who say that the Muslims do not believe that a woman has a soul ? Obviously enough, such an attitude of unending and unmitigated hostility cannot but breed a bitter reaction. The Holy Qur'an in various places proclaims the equality of men and women on almost every plane — moral, spiritual and intellectual. This is not all. The divine ideology of Islam which fourteen centuries ago, not only treated woman as a person — as a sharer of rights as well as duties — but also portrayed her in the most beautiful and apt simile yet used in any literature, religious or other ; says the Holy Qur'an : "They (the women) are your (men's) raiment and ye are their raiment."² Who does not know that the raiment gives protection and security, charm and beauty, above all, warmth and intimacy — that great attribute of companionship which the Creator of man and woman ordained to subsist between the two ?

And yet this sex is the one thing that, more than anything else, makes Islam the target of the most scurrilous attacks from Christianity. The very basic principle of Christianity

1. al-Qur'an, iv, 1.

2. al-Qur'an, ii, 187.

reduces her to the utmost degradation when it makes her the cause of human perdition. But overtly, Christianity has universally brought it to be believed through Western civilisation, that it is the deliverer and saviour of woman! Christianity *blasts* woman, but the Christian flocks are made to believe that it *blesses* her!

The present position of woman in Christendom is not the result of Christianity. For Christianity is banished bag and baggage from Christendom and is now used only for export to the developing countries to serve their capitalistic interests. The present-day Christianity has all of a sudden hypocritically found itself a great champion of the female cause, whereas in fact it axes at the very root of the fair sex. For in Christianity, woman and family are things to be shunned. Today's woman in Christendom thinks that she has freed herself from man. But in doing so, she has contrived to free herself from herself as well and thus from the best of man!

Woman in the West

The Eastern woman—in any case before her enslavement to the West—made man feel the master and he thereby felt inspired ; he, therefore, gave her his best. The Western woman after her revolt against religion did not rest till she made man feel inferior, and he forthwith ceased giving her his best. True, he became a better business man, a better so-and-so, but he degenerated as a man. Western thinkers today dolefully bear this out. Family life is obsolescent in the West. A Western home is not a commendable home for woman. Marriage is a lottery. Heart-burning transference of love and affection, neglected wives, forsaken children, mistresses, and street girls are the common features of Western life. The Western women are the most unhappy creatures on earth. Their position in society has created innumerable social, psychological and

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moral problems that they are desperately trying to solve or at least to alleviate — but all in vain.

The Western society, standing on the exaggerated ideal of equality between man and woman, has instead of improving the status of woman, actually degraded her to the status of concubines, mistresses and society butterflies who are employed as mere tools of pleasure-seekers and sex-marketers hidden behind the colourful screen of art and culture. According to recent statistics, in some Western countries 60% children are illegitimate. And this in spite of modern birth-control tactics. The Western women, in their unnatural desire and effort to be the equals of men, have forgotten that motherhood is their greatest privilege and highest honour. The woman who passes most of her life in providing attraction and amusement for men, who neglects her home affairs and household duties, who cannot look after children, and is unwilling to suffer the discomforts which home life and the rearing of children must necessarily involve, is positively a hateful creature. True respect for women can never spring from their exhibition of bodily charms and entertaining manners. It is only when women prove themselves good daughters, good wives, and good mothers that they can earn the respect of men. The so-called respect shown to them in Western society is unreal. It is founded on voluptuousness and licence for unrestricted freedom rather than on the realisation of their important role as mothers and guardians of the race.

The Western civilisation claims to “*emancipate*” woman only to exploit her as the means for destroying the home and family. Every effort is made to lure women away from the home by making the role of the housewife and mother as unattractive, unsatisfying and unrewarding.

This is achieved by subtle propaganda through the mass media belittling the traditional feminine role and glamorising those women who compete in careers with men. The wife

who achieves economic independence from her husband destroys his role as head of the family. Consequently in families where the mother dominates, the children naturally lose all respect for the father.

Most devastating, however, is the ever-increasing freedom for illicit sex. No effort is spared to exploit and commercialise the female body. The results can be seen in the sky-rocketing rise in the number of unmarried mothers, pregnant brides, illegitimate children, abortions, divorces, sex crimes, and cases of venereal diseases. While polygamy is regarded as an unpardonable crime seldom any legal penalties are enforced against fornication and adultery which are rather deliberately encouraged by the society and social environments, whereas Islam enjoins upon the husband the duty to maintain his wife and children, it stresses the obedience of the wife to her husband, respect of the children for their parents, the home as the centre of woman's life, modesty of dress, prohibition of free intermingling of unrelated men and women combined with the severe penalty laid down in the *Shari'ah* for illicit sex. All this provides conclusive proof of the supreme value Islam places on the preservation of the home and the family.

Position of Woman Under Different Religions and Cultures

Before discussing the Islamic conception of womanhood, it would be worthwhile to have a glimpse at other religions regarding her position and importance.

Greek civilisation. Starting with Greek civilisation, perhaps the oldest in the world, the conception of woman can be summed up in the words of Socrates. He says : "Woman is the greatest source of chaos and disruption in the world. She is like the *dafali* tree which outwardly looks very beautiful but if sparrows eat it, they die without fail."

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Anderosky gives the Greek conception of woman in the following words : "Cure is possible for fireburnt and snake-bite but it is impossible to arrest women's subtility."

Chinese Civilisation. In Chinese scripture women have been called the "waters of woe" that wash away all good fortune. In Chinese life the woman had always been regarded as inferior to man and she was conceded no rights whatsoever. A woman was regarded eternally a minor — her very children not properly belonging to her. A man could, whenever he pleased, repudiate his wife. He could sell his wife as a concubine. After widowhood she remained the property of her husband's family and it was almost impossible for her to remarry. With all this went slavery and infanticide. And as late as in 1937 there were still two million girl slaves in China.

For over two thousand years up to the Second World War, the Chinese masses were in the grip of a landlord class; and the grip was all the tighter because of Confucianism, which blocked progress, taught obedience, and the importance of maintaining the existing conditions.

Hinduism. Woman met a similar fate in Hinduism. And the doctrine of *Niyog* is in fact a brutal insult to pure womanhood and must excite the indignation of all those who desire the progress of morality as also of many honest thinkers even from among the Hindus. It shocks one to hear the advocates of the *Niyog* telling men that in the absence of a male offspring the wife should pollute herself with a stranger so that haply she may give birth to a son. No chaste woman would ever bear such insult.

The *Asura* form of marriage among the ancient Hindus was nothing but a kind of sale of the daughter by the father. Legalisation has hardly saved them from cruel hands, as they never inherited any property. In India in ancient times (and even now in certain parts) girls were dedicated to gods —

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rather given in actual marriage to them so that they may have the use of their services in the same way as married men had the use of their wives. Thus indirectly they are passed onto the control of priests and *dharmakarthas* or trustees attached to the temple on the same principle on which offerings dedicated to the gods became available to them. The women were also considered host of priests and officials. Women in Vedic times were treated as prizes of war. After victory women were forcibly abducted and distributed as articles of booty.

In those days, a Hindu marriage was indissoluble. Neither adultery nor prostitution nor degeneration could ever dissolve a Hindu marriage. What to say in life, even after the death of the husband widows could not claim separation! The cruel rite of *sati* was practised by which the widow of a Hindu used to burn herself on the pyre of her husband. The widow was looked upon as something loathsome, inauspicious, and fit to be shunned. The status of those widows who did not perform *sati* was so disgraceful that the poor souls considered it much better to be burnt alive than bearing long and inhuman torture at the hands of a cruel and unsympathetic society.

Professor Indra in her book *Status of Women in Mahabharata* writes : "There is no creature more sinful than woman. Woman is burning fire. She is the sharp edge of a razor. She is verily all these in a body. Men should not love them...destruction."

In Hinduism, according to the ordinance of Manu, "a woman must never seek independence and must never do anything according to her mere pleasure." The law of Hinduism is : "By a girl, by a young woman or even by an aged one nothing must be done independently, even in her own house."³

3. Manu, v, 147.

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"In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons ; a woman must never be independent."⁴

Sir R.G. Bhandarkar comments : "The Bhagvad Geeta gives expression to the general belief that it is only a sinful soul that is born as woman."⁵

Buddhism. As regards Buddhism, the teaching that Nirvana (salvation) cannot be attained in the company of woman is sufficiently eloquent to give us a clue to its attitude towards this sex.

The idea of a wedlock and its attendant worldly life is opposed to the ultimate end of Buddhism — the annihilation of desire...the striving for which one must necessarily invoke celibacy.⁶

To a follower of Buddhism, therefore, according to the celebrated historian Westermarck : "Women are, of all the snares which the tempter has spread for men, the most dangerous ; in women are embodied all the powers of infatuation which blind the mind of the world."

The conception of woman in Buddhism is summed up in the words of a renowned Buddhist scholar recorded by Bettany in his *World's Religions*, in the following words : "Unfathomably deep, like a fish's course in the water, is the character of woman, robed with many artifices, with whom truth is hard to find, to whom a lie is like the truth and the truth is like a lie."

Judaism. In Judaism, according to Hebrew Scriptures, the woman is under an eternal Divine curse. "Of the woman came the beginning sin and through her we all die," is a

4. Mann, v, 140.

5. The same writer further says : "They are debarred from reading the Vedas ; any religious rite in which they alone are concerned is directed to be performed without Vedic Mantras. Even the Bhagvad Gita gives expensive to the general belief that it is only sinful soul that is born a woman, Vaisya, or Sudra." Sir R.G. Bhandarkar, *Collected works*, p. 461.

6. U. May Oung, *Buddhist Law*, Part I, p. 2.

belief which holds poor woman responsible for all the wickedness of man. Hence her degradation in Jewish society, where she was considered not as a creature worthy of honour but as one who could be deservedly subjected to any amount of insults, and reduced to the position of a mere chattel in the house.

Christianity. To come to Christianity the whole structure of the Christian creed is based on the doctrine of Original Sin for which Christianity holds woman responsible : "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat."⁷ Eve first committed the sin and caused the fall of Adam. Thus actually she was responsible for the sins of humanity and God had to send His "only begotten son," Jesus Christ, to be crucified and to wash off the sins of humanity with his blood! This is the summary of the Christian faith.

I produce below a few quotations which alone, taken from the New Testament itself, should, without any comment whatsoever, be sufficient to show what woman in Christianity is, and how she should be shunned by those who are candidates to the Kingdom of Heaven :

For, behold, the days are coming in which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.

It is good for a man not to touch a woman.⁸

For I would, that all men were even as I myself (*i.e.*, unmarried) ... I say, therefore, to the unmarried and widows. It is good for them if they abide even as I (*i.e.*, unmarried). But if they cannot contain, let them marry : for it is better to marry than to burn.⁹

Art thou loosed from a wife ? Seek not a wife.¹⁰

7. Gen, iii, 12.

8. Luke, xxii, 29.

9. Cor. vii, 7-9.

10. Cor. vii, 27.

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He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord : But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.¹¹

He that giveth her not in marriage, doeth better.¹²

These Biblical statements on the frailty of woman could only lead the early Christian Fathers to make such "pious" aspersions about which no self-respecting woman can ever feel silent.

St. Paul, the premier saint of Christendom, proclaims : "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And "Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in transgress."

"Do you know," says St. Tertullian to women, "that each of you is an eve ; the sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age ; the guilt must necessarily live too ; you are the devil's gateway ; you are the unsealer of that tree ; you are the first deserter of the Divine law ; you are she who persuaded him when the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image in man. On account of your desert, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die" (*de Coltu Feminarum*).

"Among all men," says St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, "I sought for chastity proper to them, and I found it among none. And, verily, a person may find one man chaste among a thousand, but among women never."

According to St. Gregory of Nazianzum : "Fierce is the dragon, and cunning the asp ; but woman has the malice of both."

St. John Chrysostom regards woman as "a necessary evil, a desirable calamity, a deadly fascinator, and a painted ill."

11. Cor. vii, 32-33.

12. Cor. vii, 38.

In the eyes of St. Clement of Alexandria : "Nothing disgraceful is proper for man, who is endowed with reason ; much less for woman, to whom it brings shame to reflect of what nature she is."¹³

In fact, the builders of the Christian Church, as the early Fathers might be called, all vied in their denunciation of woman. She was described as "the organ of the Devil", "the foundation of the arms of Devil, whose voice is the hissing of the serpents", "a scorpion ever ready to sting, and the lance of the demon", "an instrument which the Devil uses to gain possession of our souls", "the gate of the Devil", "the road of iniquity, the sting of the scorpion", "an unclean thing", "a daughter of falsehood, a sentinel of Hell, the enemy of peace, (and) of the wild beasts the most dangerous", by St. Bernard, St. Anthony, St. Bonaventure, St. Cyprian, St. Jerome, and St. John Damascene, respectively.

The orthodox Greek Church denied that woman had a soul.

At the Council of Macon a Bishop vehemently asserted that woman did not belong to the human species.¹⁴

The woman was dubbed as an "unclean thing." The "uncleanness" of woman led the Christian Church to denounce even the holiness of marriage, — that great social institution of mankind. "Blessed," says St. Gregory, "is the one who leads a celibate life, and soils not the Divine image within him with the filth of concupiscence."

And is it not the oppression, the killing and the indescribable torture of the Christian Inquisition. as well as these erotic aberrations, e.g., rape, incest, and sodomy of the Nunneries, spoken by Lecky, thrugh-out the first nineteen centuries, an indirect psychological compensation of this sex-suppression advocated by Christianity ?

13. Paeds, ii, 2.83, p. 186.

14. Westermarck, p. 663.

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The position of woman in the Dark Ages—the Christian period—is summed up by Lecky in the *The History of European Morals*. He says :

“The writers of the Middle Ages are full of the accounts of Nunneries that were like brothels, of the vast multitude of infanticides within their walls and of that inveterate prevalence of incest among the clergy which rendered it necessary again and again to issue most stringent enactments that priests should not be permitted to live with their mothers and sisters.”

Lecky obviously failed to see that asceticism and monasticism could not possibly lead to anything else. Joseph McCabe in his *The Social Record of Christianity* says, “Things came to such a pass that parishioners for the protection of their own families compelled their clergy to keep concubines.”

We must ask what woman gained by the Church opening the Nunneries ? Nunneries perhaps afforded her an escape from the Christian theory and practice of regarding her as the source of all evil. Admittedly, it gave woman a little dignity, but at what price ! At the price of her womanhood, at the price of all the joy of life, for which the Creator had made her. At the price of—Woman !

Woman and Islam

Having seen how cruelly woman had been treated and mercilessly exploited by different religions and secular cultures of the world, it will now be possible for us to understand correctly the glorious achievements of Islam in this direction.

By a single masterly stroke, Islam removed the stigma of “wickedness” and “impurity” which the religions of the world had placed upon woman. Man and woman, it proclaimed, had both come from the same essence, and,

therefore, if woman could be said to be wicked, man also should be regarded as such, or if man had a single spark for nobility in him, woman also should have it. "Women," declared the Holy Prophet Muhammad s.a.w., "are the twin-halves of men."

"O mankind ! be careful of your duty to your Lord who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty towards Allah in Whom you claim (your rights) of one another, and towards the wombs (that bore you). Lo ! Allah hath been a watcher over you."¹⁵

"And Allah hath given you wives of your own kind."¹⁶

Islam denounced the assertion of Christian Fathers that woman did not possess a soul and that she would remain a sexless being in future life. It asserted in the words of the Qur'an :

"Enter into Paradise ye and your wives delighted.

Whoso doth that which is right, whether male or female, him or her will We quicken to happy life.

Lo ! men who surrender unto Allah and women who surrender, and men who believe and women who believe, and men who obey and women who obey, and men who speak the truth and women who speak the truth, and men who persevere (in righteousness) and women who persevere, and men who are humble and women who are humble, and men who give alms and women who give alms, and men who fast and women who fast, and men who guard their modesty and women who guard (their modesty), and men who remember Allah and women who remember Allah

15. Al-Quran, iv, 1.

16. Ibid., xvi, 72.

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hath prepared for them forgiveness and an ample reward.”¹⁷

Islam refuted the Biblical assertion that woman was first deceived and she was, therefore, responsible for the Fall of Adam. It declared in the most unambiguous terms that Adam and Eve were deceived simultaneously and were, therefore, equally responsible for the deed :

“And We said : O Adam ! dwell thou and thy wife in the garden and eat ye (both) freely (of the fruit) hereof where ye will but come not nigh this tree lest ye become wrongdoers.

But Satan caused them (both) to deflect there from and expelled them from the (happy) state in which they were.”¹⁸

In contrast to the view of Christianity : “Neither was Man created for the woman, nor the woman for the Man,” Islam proclaimed :

“The women are raiment for you (men) and ye are raiment for them.”¹⁹

Islam regards woman spiritually equal to man as had been shown before. It also regards her intellectually equal.

The only difference it makes is in the realm of physical conditions, and this difference is based on hard facts. It believes in the principle of the division of labour. It allots the strenuous work and the rough outdoor life to man and makes him responsible for the maintenance of the family. It regards home as the first concern of woman. It allots the work of managing the home and of upbringing and training of children to women,—a work which forms the most important item in the task of nation-building. It exhorts her to engage herself in the cultivation of learning and allows

17. Ibid., xxxiii, 35.

18. Ibid., ii, 35-36.

19. Ibid., ii, 187.

her to participate, if necessary, in social uplift and other schemes of national reconstruction. The life of the office and factory, it considers as uncongenial and unnatural for her, and is emphatic in its demands that woman should in no case step into the shoes of man, nor should man encroach upon her sphere of activity. Both should work in a spirit of harmony, sympathy, and love.

Further, there is the problem of vesting the ultimate authority in the administration of the affairs of the family. It is a fact that sound administration is impossible without a unitary policy. In a Muslim family, so far as honour is concerned, Islam has ordered to honour the mother more than the father, the sister more than the brother and the daughter more than the son. But, as regards administration, that is, in the case of the husband and wife, the final authority is vested in the husband who is also held responsible for looking after the comfort of the wife, and who cannot use his power for doing any injury to her, except at the risk of losing the favours of Allah, because the wife is not his subordinate but in the words of Holy Prophet s.a.w., "The queen of her house." The Qur'an says :

"They (women) have rights like those of men against them, though men are a degree above them. Allah is Almighty, All-Knowing."²⁰

To Muhammad s.a.w. woman was not "an organ of the Devil" but *Muhsanah* — a fortress against Satan. He gave the most honourable position to mothers when he said : "Parādisē lies under the feet of the mother" (Nasa'i).

Muhammad s.a.w. enjoined the acquisition of knowledge equally on women and men by his order : "The acquisition of knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim man and every Muslim woman" (Ibn Majah).

20. Ibid., ii, 228.

The matrimonial union of man and woman had been viewed with disapproval and had been regarded as derogatory to man in certain religion. But Muhammad S.A.W. laid it down once for all :

“Marriage is of my ways and whoever disinclines from my way is not from me (*i.e.*, is not my follower)” (Bukhari, Muslim).

“When man has married, he has completed one-half of his religion.” (Baihaqi).

He raised the ideal of wifehood.

And of His (God's) signs is this : He created for you helpmates from (among) yourselves that ye might find solace in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy.²¹

He inculcated respect for women in these words :

God commands us to treat women nobly, for they are our mothers, daughters, and aunts.

The world and all things in the world are precious but the most precious thing in the world is a virtuous woman (Muslim).

He bade his followers to behave most humanely towards their wives :

“... Consort with them (*i.e.*, the wives) in kindness, for if ye hate them it may happen that ye hate a thing wherein Allah hath placed much good.”²²

The best of you are they who behave best to their wives (Tirmidhi).

A Muslim must not hate his wife, and if he be displeased with one bad quality in her, then let him be pleased with one that is good.

21. Ibid., xxx, 21.

22. Ibid., iv, 19.

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The more civil and kind a Muslim is to his wife, the more perfect of faith he is (Tirmidhi).

Fear God in respect of women (Muslim).

"Women," said he "is the queen of her house."

When a woman observes the five times of prayers, and fasts in the month of Ramadan, and is chaste, and is not disobedient to her husband, then tell her to enter Paradise by whichever door she likes.

Before the advent of Holy Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. woman did not enjoy a position independent of man. This she received from him. In Islam woman is an independent personality. She can enter into business, make any contract or testament in her own name. She is entitled to inherit, as mother, wife, sister and daughter, a thing unknown in any other religion, civilisation or legislation. She is given liberty to choose her husband.

It is not lawful for a guardian to force an adult virgin into marriage. None, not even the father nor the sovereign, can lawfully contract woman in marriage who is an adult and of sound mind without her permission, whether she be a virgin or not.

She was also given an independent position as regards the right of owning wealth :

Unto men a fortune from that which they have earned, and unto women a fortune from that which they have earned. (Envy not one another) : but ask Allah of His bounty. Lo ! Allah is ever knower of all things.²³

Unto the men (of a family) belongeth a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, and that unto the women share of that which parents and near kindred leave, whether it be little or much — a legal share.²⁴

23. Ibid., iv, 31.

24. Ibid., iv, 7.

The Problem of Polygamy

Much harsh and unthinking criticism has been levelled against Islam for having permitted polygamy by a people who are hostile to this creed. It is not realised that the Islamic permission for polygamy was and remains conditional. The Holy Qur'an says :

“And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly with the orphans marry of the women who seem good to you, two or three or four ; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to many) then one (only) or (the captives) that your right hands possess. Thus it is more likely that ye will not do injustice.”²⁵

It will be clear from the above verse that Islam does not enjoin polygamy but only sanctions it to meet the exigencies of time. Monogamy is the food which sustains society. Polygamy is the medicine of the disease of the society. If the West were to follow Islam in this respect today, all the destitute and helpless women there could become members of decent families, and prostitution and immorality can be effectively stamped out.

The great Western thinker and playwright, Bernard Shaw, advised the people of Europe to adopt polygamy in order to save Europe from the inundation of adultery. Another Western writer, J.E. McFarlane, in his *The Case for Polygamy or the Case against the System of Monogamous Marriage*, writes :

“Whether the question is considered socially, ethically or religiously, it can be demonstrated that polygamy is not contrary to the highest standards of civilisation. . . . The suggestion offers a practical remedy for the Western problem of destitute females ; the alternative

25. Ibid., iv, 3.

is continued and increased prostitution, concubinage and distressing spinsterhood."

In short, polygamy in Islam came into practice to serve the interest of the weaker sex, and it will continue to serve in this capacity whenever the situation demanded. This is the spirit of the Islamic law of polygamy.

A word from Dr. Annie Besant would not be out of place here. She says :

"There is pretended monogamy in the West, but there is really polygamy without responsibility ; the 'mistress' is cast off when the man is weary of her and sinks gradually to be the 'woman of the street' for the first lover has no responsibility for her future and she is a hundred times worse off than the sheltered wife and mother in the polygamous home. When we see thousands of miserable women, who crowd the streets of Western towns during the night, we must surely feel that it does not lie in Western mouths to reproach Islam for its polygamy. It is better for a woman, more respectable for a woman, to live in Islamic polygamy united to one man only, with the legitimate child in her arms surrounded with respect, than to be reduced, cast out on the streets perhaps with an illegitimate child outside the pale of law — unsheltered and uncared for, to become a victim of any passerby, night after night, rendered incapable of motherhood, despised by all."

Dr. Billy Graham, the world famous Evangelist says :

"Christianity cannot compromise on the question of Polygamy. If present-day Christianity cannot do so, it is to its own detriment. Islam has permitted Polygamy as a solution to social ills and has allowed a certain degree of latitude to human nature but only within the strictly defined framework of the law. Christian countries make a great show of Monogamy, but actually they

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practise Polygamy. No one is unaware of the part mistresses play in Western society. In this respect Islam is a fundamentally honest religion, and permits a Muslim to marry a second wife if he must be strictly forbidden all clan/destine amatory associations in order to safeguard the moral polity of the community."

On Divorce

Marriage with all its sacredness is a civil contract in Islam and can be subjected to any reasonable and lawful stipulation. The Western world has realised the hardship of the unnatural and irrational dogma under which it is believed that human agency cannot separate what has been joined together by God. Divorce, according to Islam, being a preventive measure against breach of peace, a device for securing an amicable settlement, and after all a salutary safeguard to protect the weaker sex from continuous illtreatment, due to disagreement or any other reason, has justly been provided as a dissolution of an unhappy marriage which may turn out to be a burden rather than an asset and, contrary to all expectations of happiness and help, may happen to be a horror and hindrance.

Marriage being a civil contract in Islam, divorce, then, is a natural corollary to the conception of marriage and it is regrettable that it may have furnished European critics with a handle to attack. In fact, it is grossly unfair to call the Islamic law of divorce as lax ; for a Muslim has to remember the words of the Holy Prophet s.a.w. as recorded in the Hadith : "Of all the permissible things, divorce is most disliked by Allah." Again, he is reported to have said : "The curse of God rests on him who repudiates his wife capriciously." The Holy Qur'an expressly forbids a man to seek pretexts for divorcing his wife so long as she remains faithful and obedient to him in matters recommended by law : "If

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women obey you (*i.e.*, in lawful matters), then do not seek a way against them," that is, seek not a pretext for separation.

Again the Holy Qur'an says :

"When ye have divorced women, and they have reached their term, then retain them in kindness or release them in kindness. Retain them not to their hurt so that ye transgress (the limits). He who doth that hath wronged his soul. Make not the revelation of Allah a laughing stock (by your behaviour), but remember Allah's grace upon you and that which He hath revealed unto you of the Scripture and wisdom, whereby He doth exhort you. Observe your duty to Allah and know that Allah is Aware of all things.

And when ye have divorced women and they reach their term, place not difficulties in the way of their marrying their husbands if it is agreed between them in kindness. This is an admonition for him among you who believeth in Allah and the last Day. That is more virtuous for you, and cleaner. Allah knoweth ; ye know not."²⁶

Apart from genuine justice Islam would really require all men to be at least fair to the women or else, in case of disagreement, they may set them free by means of divorce :

"If a woman feareth ill-treatment from her husband, or desertion, it is no sin for them twain if they make terms of peace between themselves. Peace is better. But greed hath been made present in the minds (of men). If ye do good and keep from evil, lo ! Allah is ever informed for what ye do.

Ye will not be able to deal equally between (your) wives, however much ye wish (to do so). But turn not altogether away (from one), leaving her as in suspense.

26. Ibid., ii, 231-232.

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If ye do good and keep from evil lo ! Allah is Ever Forgiving, Merciful.

But if they separate, Allah will compensate each out of His abundance. Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing.²⁷

O Prophet ! when ye (men) divorce women, put away for their (legal) period and reckon the period, and keep your duty to Allah, your Lord. Expel them not from their houses not let them go forth unless they commit open immorality. Such are the limits (imposed by) Allah : and whoso transgresseth Allah's limits, he verily wrongeth his world. Thou knowest not : it may be that Allah will afterward bring some new thing to pass. Then, when they have reached their term, take them back in kindness or part from them in kindness, call to witness two just men among you, and keep your testimony upright for Allah. Whoso believeth in Allah and the Last Day is exhorted to act thus. And whosoever keepeth his duty to Allah will appoint a way out for him, and will provide for him from (a quarter) whence he hath no expectation. And whosoever putteth his trust in Allah, He will suffice him. Lo ! Allah bringeth His command to pass. Allah hath set a measure for all things."²⁸

Conclusion

Woman in true Islamic conception is a shrine of sanctity in contrast to Christianity where she is regarded as a source of all evil. With one word Muhammad s.a.w. raised her to the highest pedestal when he said : "Heaven lies at the feet of thy mother." Under the teachings of Christianity if the first mother brought eternal Hell, in Islam she has opened the door of Paradise.

27. Ibid., iv, 128-130.

28. Ibid., ixv, 1-5.

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There has been during the last so many years a regular fight between the two sexes as to their respective rights and obligations ; but could the advocates of the Suffragette movement claim a better position for woman than has already been awarded her in the Holy Qur'an ?

The status of woman in Islam with regard to inheritance, property, marriage, and divorce is much higher in comparison with other religions. The world must know and accept the truth that no other faith has given the womenfolk so many rights and has so preserved their honour and chastity as Islam has done.

Pierre Crabbites, in his article, "Things Muhammad did for Woman," observes :

"The Muslim woman is a driving force which was fashioned by Muhammad's mastermind. Muhammad, fourteen hundred years ago, assured to the mothers, wives and daughters of Islam a rank and dignity not yet generally assured to women by the laws of the West."

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By Khurshid Ahmad

"In history the ages of disintegration were usually the ages in which women had left the home. In fifth century Greece, the high point of classical history, women stayed in the home. But after Alexander's time when city-states were breaking up, there was a feminist movement like our own."

—Prof. Arnold J. Toynbee

One of the most revolutionary movement of our times has been the movement of the "*emancipation*" of woman. It has been so dynamic in character, so cataclysmic in effects and so tragic in its result that it deserves a careful study by all students of sociology. The movement rose with the emergence of capitalism and spread like wild fire. It tore asunder the bonds of custom and religion. It set to fire the curtains which separated the male and the female. In the present century the movement has reached its zenith. The results this movement has produced are now crystal-clear. They are alarming and baffling and appalling. Even those who once paddled the movement now stand dumbfounded at the sight of the wretchedness and depravity which it has created.

But true to our traditions of slavery, we are now embracing the movement which has been proved in Europe to be a bear's embrace. It seems as if we are always behind the march of time. We believe in what Europe believed half a century ago and what its saner elements have already begun to spurn. We only wear those thought-garments which seem to be Europe's refuse !

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Now in the Muslim world this movement of women's so-called emancipation is firmly afoot. Efforts are being made to smuggle women into the rough and tumble of socio-economic life. They are being made to leave their hearth and home. *Purdah* is being discarded and free-mingling of both sexes is encouraged. It is time that the conscientious men and women of our country give thought to the problem. We invite them to "know the tree by the fruits it has already brought forth." The effects of this movement are only too clear on the European way of life. Let us not play with fire, like a blind man. Let us think, for :—

"Moral sense is almost completely ignored by modern society. We have, in fact, suppressed its manifestations. All are imbued with irresponsibility. Those who discern good and evil, those who are industrious and provident remain poor and are looked upon as backward. The woman who has several children, who devotes herself to their education instead of her own career, is considered weak-minded . . . Robbers enjoy prosperity in peace: Gangsters are protected by politicians and respected by judges . . . Homosexuality flourishes. Sexual morals have been cast aside; . . . (and thus) despite the marvels of scientific civilization, human personality tends to dissolve." (Dr. Alexis Carrel : *"Man the Unknown."*)

Imposing upon woman the obligation of earning bread by working laboriously in mills, in factories and on farms has proved to be a great liability. It has struck a fatal blow to the family life. An acute disintegration has set in. The once noble institution of family, the guardian of culture and the protector of civilization, has collapsed like a house of cards. Women abandoned it. Men disliked it. Streets became the centres of activities. Restaurants and parks became the places of romantic ventures. This further fanned the flames of sexual fire. And today we have come to such a stage that even George Ryley Scott has to say :

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"Today by far more than ever before in the world's history there are for the finding large numbers of girls of respectability who are willing for all sorts of reason, to meet men halfway for sexual excitement and satisfaction. *These are the amateur prostitutes of modern civilization.* (*"A History of Prostitution."*)

This emancipation has not stopped here. *Amateurism* has further progressed. It has assumed such grave proportions that now it has become a veritable threat to Professional Prostitution. A governmental report about Vienna says that the main reason for the decline of prostitution there is "that owing to the change in the sex morals now in vogue the young man no longer has the need which once existed for the use of prostitutes" (Reuter—Dawn Jan. 7; 1952). Is this the fruit of the emancipation of woman ?

Peaceful married life has become a mirage. Illegitimate births are on the increase. In France their number is more than 77,000 a year. About England, the report presented to the Diocesan Conference in 1946 is highly revealing. Its authors say :

"At least one in every eight children born in England and Wales is conceived outside wedlock. One hundred thousand women in England and Wales are becoming pregnant outside of marriage every year. Of all the girls who marry under 20 years of age no less than 40 per cent are already pregnant on their wedding day."

Dr. Oswald Schwarz's estimates further endorse the same view. He say :

"The average number of women who give birth to extramaritally conceived children was for each year almost exact 80,000 (1 in every 8 of all first maternities). In 1938, 40 per cent of girls marrying under the age of 20 and 20 per cent of those aged 21 came under

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this category. These figures, impressive as they are, *represent only those affairs in which something has gone wrong, that is to say, only a small fraction of those which actually have existed.*" (The Psychology of Sex).

The Kinsey Report is even more revealing. About the American male population the findings are :—

"95 per cent of the population is corrupt according to the current moral standards."

Children are caught in the whirl-pool of sexual immorality even at the age of four and five.

Pre-martial sex relations have assumed baffling proportions. The doctor say :

"Among the males going to college about 67 per cent have such experience before marriage. Among those who go to a high school, about 84 per cent have such intercourses, and among the boys who do not go beyond the grade school, the accumulative incidence is 98 per cent." (*Sexual Behaviour in Human Male*, p. 552.)

Regular violation of marriage-bed is a common feature of American life. Nearly 50 per cent of the males succumb to it.

Homosexuality is on the increase and one in every three male, has some such experience.

Even contacts with animals are rampant and one male out of every twelve is involved in such dirty affairs. (*Ibid*, p. 670).

On the whole the doctors hold that according to the current laws 95 per cent of the American males should be behind the bars as they violate the law in one way or the other.

As regards the Female population of America, the Kinsey Report says :

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- 50 per cent of the American women (of all ages) lose their virginity before marriage.

More than 25 per cent violate the marriage-bed and feel no regrets for betraying their husbands.

20 per cent have Homosexual relations.

62 per cent masturbate.

95 per cent succumb to petting.

The rate of sexual violations and malpractices is high among the college girls and educated women.

43 per cent of the women have learned the malpractices from printed or verbal sources primarily designed to discourage the practices.

Only those groups are living a comparatively noble life of decency who follow religion. Religious devotion is the "rime" and "potent" factor in arresting sexual laxity.

The above statistics prove beyond any shadow of doubt that, under the spell of materialistic creeds, morals dwindle, manners deteriorate, corruption increases and vulgarity becomes the order of the day. The English psychologist Mr. Noel Brain rightly remarks :

"In fact the thing that really stands out of Dr. Kinsey's reports both on the American male and the American female is that all of them are living in a corrupt and frustrating society."

Addressing himself to those Englishmen who want to import the American morals and manners in their country, Mr. Brain declares emphatically :

"Nevertheless the picture he (Kinsey) presents is enough to show once more how far the American Way of Life is from being a civilization we want either to import or to emulate."

“Dr. Kinsey’s girls and boys are deeply to be pitied for what they have done to themselves. But we don’t want them over here till the American people find a cure.”

The Kinsey Report has shown that the world is immensely in need of moral values—and never was that need so imperative as it is today. The Western society seems to be approaching its journey’s end. Only the rediscovery of morality can give it a new lease of life. It must be clearly understood that the current moral chaos in the West is not an accidental growth. It is not a thunderbolt but only the natural (although bitter) fruit of the seeds sown by the so-called “emancipation,” “freedom from morals” and the materialistic attitude towards life.

The Reaction

These results have shocked all thinking minds. In the West itself a strong reaction has set in. Some of the Western thinkers are condemning this mad craze for immorality. They have become doubtful of their own ideology and standards, and they have now started saying what the Muslims have been saying all along. Thus, for instance, Bertrand Russell says :

“Within the classes that are dwindling, it is the best element that is dwindling most rapidly. It seems unquestionable that if our economic system and our moral standard remain unchanged, there will be in the next two or three generations a rapid change for the worse in the character of the population in all civilized countries. The problem is one which applies to the whole Western civilization.” (*The Principles of Social Reconstruction*).

A learned woman medical scientist, Mrs. Hudson Shaw, advocates the need of Marriage in the back-ground of the evil of sex-anarchy in the following words :

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"In all this argument I have tried to reach those realities of human nature on which human morality must be based. I believe that the fundamental things which we must take into account are, first, the complex nature of human beings who have body, soul and spirit to reckon with and who cannot neglect any one of these without insincerity, and secondly, the solidarity of the human race which makes it futile to act as though the 'morals' of any one of us could be his personal affair alone. It is because of this solidarity that marriage has always been regarded as a matter of public interest to be recognised by law, celebrated by some public ceremony and protected by legal contract." (*Sex and Commonsense*, p. 49.)

The views of this lady might irritate our ultra-modern women who aspire to imitate the West, because it is a fact that she has administered a slap on the face of all those who want to popularise the Western conception of sex-relations in our Society. Thus she says :

"Now when our civilization is indeed tottering on the verge of collapse we see that in fact the last decades have been marked by a choice of licence for both sexes rather than discipline. The result has been an enormous waste of creative power. Prostitution and promiscuity, combined with the prevention of conception and not combined with any kind of creative results whatever, homo-sexuality in both sexes, and various forms of abnormality, represent to us the unwholesome swamp into which the waters of energy have flowed, "Is this a Symptom or a Cause of our Collapse ? Both, I think." (*Sex and Commonsense*).

Historians' Verdict

Modern thinkers of almost all shades of opinion now think that the Western society is becoming an awful place to

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live in. They have begun to visualise a dismal future for it. The historians are warning them in most clear terms :

Prof. J.D. Unwin says that disintegration and moral laxity have always gone hand in hand. His marvellous book *Sex and Culture* is replete with eye-opening historical illustrations.

Anthony M. Ludivici says that "the mere fact, that in all periods of decline woman has always come to the fore shows (the historical fact) that feminism is undeniably a phenomenon of male disintegration." (*Woman : A Vindication*).

Prof. Arnold J. Toynbee proclaims that :

"In history the ages of disintegration were usually the ages in which the woman had left the home" (*World Review, March 1949*).

The author of the article on "Feminine Influence in Politics" arrays a wealth of detail from the histories of Greece, Rome, England, France etc., to prove his theme that the disintegration of civilization has always coincided with baneful feminist movements and their influence in social and political life and that :

"The hey-day of their (i.e., the women's) power happened to coincide with greatest degree of degeneracy among the male population." (*Universal History of the World*, Vol. VII, p. 3985).

The author believes in separate spheres of work for men and women and concludes with the remark that :

"All that our thesis and the historical data collected above entitle us to argue is that at the healthiest periods in the history of all people the male population appears to distinguish so sharply between its public functions and duties and its relationship to women that no such phenomenon as direct or indirect feminine influence in politics is possible. Feminine domination is as a rule only an accompanying symptom of the general decline." (*Ibid.*, p. 4004).

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Woman Dewomanised

The historian is not alone in his condemnation. The philosopher, the scientist, the journalist, the social reformer, all are raising their voices against the tragedy of woman's life in the modern West. For instance, Dr. Henri C. Link is alarmed at the mounting divorce-rate and says :

"The divorce rate, certainly an aspect of social harmony, is at an all-time high, more than one in every five marriages, and promises in *twenty years to be one in every two marriages*" (*The Rediscovery of Morals*, p. 17.)

The journalist, Dorothy Thompson, very frankly declares that :

"Woman put on precisely on the same level as man has been dewomanised." And who can refute the learned lady who is saying this after much thought and experience !

Prof. C.E.M. Joad, once an enthusiastic supporter of the Feminist movement and the leader of the "Men's Political Union for Women's Enfranchisement" now repents over his mistakes and declares that the real place of woman is not the social circus but the home. In his autobiography he argues by giving an example and says :

"If you want to build a bridge or a town-hall you don't pick up a chance collection of persons out of the street and ask them to undertake the job ; you call in an expert engineer and an expert architect. But if you want to build what is after all more important than a bridge or a town-hall, namely, a modern citizen, you leave the job to any chance-couple of persons who are able to produce one. Now any pair of persons, provided they be of opposite sexes, are capable of producing a citizen—the job is indeed all-too-fatally

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easy. But the ability to produce does not connote any ability to educate, to build a character, to guide an intellect, to develop a personality. Very much the contrary ! *And it is just because we leave the task of making citizens to chance-couples that our bridges are so much better than our citizens and we ourselves are on the whole the grubby, unworthy, ill-shaped, ill-named and meagre-minded lot that you see around you.*" (*The Book of Joad*, p. 26).

This belief of Dr. Joad has been further strengthened lately. In a recent interview he says :

"I believe the world would be a happier place if women were content to look after their homes and their children, even if some slight lowering of the standard of living were involved thereby." (*Variety*, Dec 1, 1952).

Prof. Fulton J. Sheen is also of the same opinion. He says :

"The disturbance of family life in America is more desperate than at any other period in our history. The family is the barometer of the nation. What the average home is that is America. If the average home is living on credit spending money lavishly, running into debt, then America will be a nation which will pile national debt on national debt until the day of the Great Collapse. If the average husband and wife are not faithful to their marriage vows, then America will not insist on fidelity to the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms. If there is a deliberate frustration of the fruits of love, then the nation will develop economic policies of flowing undue cotton, throwing coffee into the sea and frustrating nature for the sake of economic prices. If the husband and wife live only for self and not for each other, if they fail to see that

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their individual happiness is conditioned on mutuality, then we shall have a country where capital and labour fight like husband and wife, both making social life barren and economic peace impossible. If the husband or wife permits outside solicitations to woo one away from the other, then we shall become a nation where alien philosophies will infiltrate as Communism sweeps away that basic loyalty which was known as patriotism. If husband and wife live as if there is no God, then America shall have bureaucrats pleading for atheism as a national policy repudiating the Declaration of Independence and denying that all our rights and liberties come to us from God. It is the home which decides the nation. What happens in the family will happen later in the Congress, the White House and the Supreme Court. Every country gets the kind of Government it deserves. As we live in the house, so shall the nation live." (*Communism and Conscience of the West*).

Necessity Of Religion

This learned author is very much perturbed at the vulgarisation of family life. He sees no way out of the impasse except that of the return of women to the home and the revival of the family life. About this Dr. Sheen says :

"America is a democracy ; hence the only way—and the right way—we can arrest the rot is not by a Presidential decree, not by a uniform divorce law, not by handling the problem of juvenile delinquency in each new age *without even stopping it at its source, HOME*,—but only by a conscience enlightened by religion and morality."

These are the views of some of the leading thinkers of the West. Their reaction against their own sex-culture is now

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too manifest. They are baffled at the menance of sex-anarchy — the natural offshoot of the so-called movement of feminine emancipation which instead of restoring woman to her natural status “emancipated” her by driving her out of the home and the family-life, by auctioning her femininity in the streets and the bazars and by making her a society-toy. The West is realising the folly. But, alas ! the Westernised Muslim is still lost in his vagaries. He now wants to sexualise the society and to establish a Sex-Dictatorship in our society. It is time we open our eyes and learn to call a spade a spade. Let us ponder over the eye-opening views of Dr. Cyrill Garbett and from our views as to what road we have to tread — the one heading towards anarchy, crime and corruption or the one leading to home, peace and prosperity. He says :

“It is a matter of common knowledge that large numbers of men and women have sexual inter-course without any thought of marriage with their sexual partners. This is the result of the greater freedom between young people of both sexes, of the nervous strain of war, of life under conditions which make abstinence extremely difficult, and of the erotic atmosphere created by an unending stream of emotional novels and films. Only definite moral conviction based upon religious faith will give the necessary self-control.” (*In an Age of Revolution*, p. 76).

This is the tragedy of woman in the Modern West. It is no better than the fate she was subjected to in the medieval times. Under Christianity the West was on one extreme. It denied woman her soul and personality. She was not treated as a human being at all. Her was a miserable existence. Then the reaction appeared. Modern Western Culture moved to the other extreme. Woman was driven out of her home and was “commercialised” and “socialised”. She was not allowed

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to live and grow and act like woman. In short she was de-womanised. On this extreme too her plight is miserable. She has not discovered her real self. The middle path is unknown to her—to the West on the whole. Her salvation lies in that way of life which strikes the Middle Path—in Islam, whose Prophet s.a.w. said :

“Best of the positions (in human affairs) is that of the Middle.”